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ABSTRACT

This guide offers suggestions to postsecondary students with disabilities for successfully managing the transition from a two-year to a four-year college. Data are offered showing that fewer students with disabilities attend postsecondary institutions and, of those, fewer attend four-year institutions and eventually earn bachelors degrees. A survey of 119 students with disabilities attending two-year colleges found they had concerns in differences in disabled student services, inadequate financial support, the transferring process, housing/transportation, personal/family issues, and differences in academic requirements. A survey of disabled student service staff from 351 institutions of higher education identified such challenges as differences in academic requirements and inadequate self-advocacy skills. Students are urged to understand these challenges and then take the following steps: (1) map your path (plan the transition); (2) make a map (ask yourself key questions); (3) learn about your options (identify characteristics of a desired school or program); and (4) look ahead (plan for your transition to the work force). The paper also describes a related videotape and the University of Washington DO-IT project. (DB)

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How Students with Disabilities can Transition from 2 to 4 Year Colleges

University of Washington

2001

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Moving On: The Two-Four Step

DO-IT **How Students With Disabilities can Transition from 2 to 4 year Colleges**

Individuals with disabilities are under-represented in four-year postsecondary academic programs, particularly in technical fields such as science, mathematics, engineering, and technology. The documented success of some individuals with disabilities in fields where they have been underrepresented suggests there is potential to significantly increase the representation of this group in challenging academic programs and careers. Some of these individuals begin their college studies in two-year institutions.

Fewer students with disabilities attend postsecondary institutions, and of those, fewer attend four-year institutions and eventually earn bachelors degrees than their non-disabled peers. A recent study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics found that two years after high school, 63% of the students with disabilities had enrolled in some form of postsecondary education compared to 72% of the students without disabilities. Of those enrolled, 42% of the students with disabilities were in four-year schools compared to 62% without disabilities. After five years, 53% of the students with disabilities that attained a degree or certificate were still enrolled compared to 64% of the students without disabilities. Of the students with disabilities, 16% earned a bachelors degree; 25% earned an associate's degree or vocational certificate. Of the students without disabilities, 27% attained a bachelor's degree and 25% earned an associate's degree or vocational certificate.

Many of the two-year college students with disabilities who have the desire and potential to succeed in a four-year postsecondary program have difficulties making a successful transition. Challenges relate to their own knowledge and skills and to the differences between two- and four-year schools.

Challenges

Students with disabilities report special challenges in making a successful transition from two- to four-year schools. 119 students with disabilities from 19 two-year colleges in Washington state participated in a survey conducted by DO-IT. Their top concerns about transferring to a four-year institution were in the following categories:

- differences in disabled student services
- inadequate financial support
- the transferring process
- housing/transportation
- personal/family issues
- differences in academic requirements

They also rated differences in disabled student services between two- and four-year schools to be a high concern.

Professionals who work with postsecondary students with disabilities report a range of challenges students with disabilities encounter that negatively impact successful transitions to four-year schools. Disabled student services staff from 351 institutions of higher education participated in a survey conducted by DO-IT. They reported the greatest challenges faced by two-year college students with disabilities as they transfer to four-year schools to be the following:

- differences in academic requirements
- poor study skills
- inadequate self-advocacy skills
- inadequate academic prep

- financial support
- lack of mentors with disabilities
- differences in disabled student services

A total of 46 faculty and staff from two- and four-year institutions of higher education from 24 states who participated in focused discussions of these issues also reported that transfer students face challenges in:

- moving away from home
- understanding and working through the transfer process
- securing financial support
- meeting the admissions requirements of the four-year institution and specific degree programs
- adjusting to differences in disability documentation requirements
- adjusting to differences in the disabled student services offered
- adjusting to a larger, less personal environment where it is more difficult to make friends and get to know faculty
- meeting the academic standards of the four-year school

Knowing about the challenges that other students with disabilities have faced can help you create your own map for a successful transition to a four-year school. Then take the following steps.

Transition Steps

Map Your Path

If you want to start out at a community college or are already enrolled in one, and then transfer to a four-year school to complete your work, make the most of this college experience. There are many advantages to taking classes at the community college level. Community colleges often offer smaller class sizes, more time with instructors, and lower tuition. While enrolled at a community college, find out what courses you can take at the two-year school that will transfer to the four-year institution.

Choosing a college or career shouldn't be like a game of chance. It should be based on careful planning. A transition plan will help you take control of your future. Having a transition plan or map can help you make a smooth and seamless transition from a two-year to a four-year institution.

Now is the time to start looking at your options. In choosing a four-year college or university, approach this task as if you were an employer looking to hire a highly qualified employee. Think about it! In a sense, you are about to be an employer. For the next few years of your life you will be paying someone to provide you with an education and to help you obtain the skills you need for your future. In doing so, make sure you get the most for your money. Below are some ideas to consider when you are sorting through the many postsecondary options.

Make a Map

Determine your destination. Get to know yourself better by answering the following questions:

- Where do you want to be in ten years?
- What did you like and dislike about the two-year college you attended or are currently attending?
- What are some of the characteristics you would like in the college or university that you will attend?
- Do you have a specific career in mind? If so, what type of academic preparation is required to enter this career field? If not, where can you get information about career options and academic requirements? Is a technical degree, a two-year degree, or a four-year degree required and/or recommended?

- Look at all aspects of the degree program that you choose and determine if you will be able to fulfill all of the degree requirements. Determine if your disability affects your ability to complete the requirements. If so, discuss possible accommodations prior to starting the program.

Learn About Your Options

Consider all the possible routes you can take to reach your goal as you plan your trip. Narrow down your options by identifying your four-year college choices and comparing them.

- Where can you get information on academic programs of interest to you? What schools offer the program you need?
- What disability-related accommodations and services will you need to be successful? In college, as well as on the job, you are expected to advocate for yourself. You should know what you need to succeed, then find out how to get it. You are the expert! Make a list of all the things that you feel are important for your school to provide. This list should include things in areas such as:
    - degree programs
    - financial aid
    - campus accessibility
    - disabled student services
    - library support services
    - computer and network access
    - tutoring
    - work study and internships
    - campus climate
    - transportation
    - housing
    - dining
    - child care
    - social organizations
- What, if any, obstacles do you foresee in enrolling in and/or succeeding at a four-year school, such as finances, general admission requirements, housing, or disability-related accommodations?

After you've made a list of things you need to know, find the answers. The Internet can be a valuable research tool. Contact the schools and get information on general admission as well as specific requirements of the program in which you are interested.

Once you've decided where you want to end up, the next step is to figure out how you are going to get there. Contact the Disabled Student Services (DSS) office directly at your top choices of four-year colleges or universities that you may attend. Be specific; tell them that you are thinking about enrolling in their institution. Describe your disability and the types of accommodation that you think will work best for you. Ask them what types of documentation are required to obtain these accommodations. Every college is unique in the types of services they provide and the types of documentation they require.

Visit the campus for yourself. Don't take another person's word that the campus is accessible to you. What is accessible to him/her may not be accessible to you. Arrange for a campus tour. Visit the library, the dining hall, the dorms, the DSS office, the bookstore, and some classrooms.

Now you should be able to rank the schools from the one that meets your needs the best to the one that meets your needs the least. Apply to more than one school. After you receive your acceptance letters, pick the school that is the closest to your ideal. Don't let someone else choose for you. Remember, you are the expert on yourself; you know best what you need to succeed.

Once you arrive at the school, check out programs that may be beneficial and offer specialized services to you such as the Women's Center, minority programs, or student support groups.

Look Ahead

While you are still in college, start getting ready to transition to the work force. Use a transition plan similar to the one described above. Consider locating a job in college, internship, or a cooperative education experience in the career field you are moving toward. These experiences can help you decide if you really like this career field while there is still time to change your academic goal, provide you with real world experiences that you can put on your resume, and sometimes they can even lead to job offers.

Resources

To accompany this handout, DO-IT has created a videotape with the same title, *Moving On: The Two-Four Step*. DO-IT has many other useful publications, brochures, and videotapes, including *College: You Can Do It*, that can help you reach your academic goals, and *It's Your Career*, for guidelines in finding work-based learning opportunities. Send a check to DO-IT for $25 to order each type.

For information resources related to DO-IT, disabilities, adaptive technology, postsecondary education, and careers, access DO-IT's World Wide Web pages at *http://www.washington.edu/doit*. DO-IT's printed publications are also available at this site.

Grants and gifts fund DO-IT publications, videotapes, and programs to support the academic and career success of people with disabilities. Contribute today by sending a check to DO-IT, Box 355670, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195-5670.

Your gift is tax deductible as specified in IRS regulations. Pursuant to RCW 19.09, the University of Washington is registered as a charitable organization with the Secretary of State, State of Washington. For more information, call the Office of the Secretary of State, 800-322-4483.

About DO-IT

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